

THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

In 500 B.C., Rome was just one of many small towns in Italy. But by 133 B.C., the town had gained control of all Italy, and had conquered foreign lands as well. Roman armies won victories in Spain, Greece, Macedonia, Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), and North Africa.

There were several reasons for the success of the Romans. First, Rome was located in the center of the Mediterranean world. This made it easy for its army and navy to move quickly in any direction. Second, soldiers were courageous and well-trained, and battles were carefully planned ahead of time by able generals. Third, the Romans had the ability to make friends out of their defeated enemies. Eventually, conquered people accepted wise and capable Roman rule and the peace that it brought.

The government in the early years of the Roman Republic had three branches -- the consuls, the Senate, and the Assembly. Each branch had various powers. Study the diagram and information below, then answer the questions on the next page.

3 Branches of Early Roman Government

2 consuls

Senate

(patricians)

Assembly

(patricians and plebeians)

Separation of Powers Among the 3 Branches

2 consuls

- (1) oversaw the work of other government officials
- (2) acted as judges
- (3) directed the army in wartime
- (4) elected for a 1-year term
- (5) both consuls had to agree before the government could take action
- (6) in an emergency, consuls could choose a "dictator" (one powerful ruler) to make quick decisions
- (7) they chose the Senators

Senate

- (1) held office for life
- (2) were advisors to the consuls and other government officials
- (3) could approve or disapprove laws passed by Assembly
- (4) decided how money should be spent
- (5) made decisions concerning relations with foreign countries
- (6) had influence over the consuls and the army

Assembly

- (1) voted on laws suggested by government officials
- (2) could declare war or make peace treaties
- (3) elected the 2 consuls
- (4) elected government officials

Completion Questions

- (1) _____ Instead of having a king, the Romans preferred having these at the head of their government.
- (2) _____ A "republic" is a type of government where representatives make the laws. Was Rome a republic? (yes or no)
- (3) _____ They were rich landowners who controlled the Senate. They also had the most power in the Assembly.
- (4) _____ They were the "common people" of Rome who belonged to the Assembly, but had little influence in the government.
- (5) _____ These people suggested laws for the Roman Republic.
- (6) _____ The two consuls were elected by this group.
- (7) _____ Rich, well-to-do citizens who often owned large tracts of land were called "nobles". What is another name for these people?
- (8) _____ Which two branches of government had a part in making laws?
- (9) _____ Which branch controlled the spending of money?
- (10) _____ Which branch would decide whether or not Rome should go to war with another country?

Thought Questions

- (1) Before 509 B.C., Rome was ruled by a king. Then, the city established the Roman Republic with power divided among three branches of government. Why do you think the Romans wanted to govern themselves in this way?

- (2) Which branch of government -- consuls, Senate, or Assembly -- had the most power? Explain your answer.

(3) In what two ways was the power of the two consuls limited?

(4) Why was a dictator chosen to head the government in time of emergency?

(5) The government of the United States has a President, Congress, and Supreme Court. Explain one way that the American government is like the ancient Roman government, and one way that it is different.

(6) When the Roman Republic first began in 509 B.C., power was in the hands of the wealthy landowners -- the patricians. The common people, or plebeians, had many complaints. They had little voice in the government. They were treated unfairly under the law. Punishments were often severe. They had to pay high interest rates on loans, and could not marry patricians. Between 494 and 287 B.C., the plebeians struggled to gain equality with the patricians. This period of time was known as the "Conflict of the Orders". The main reason equality was finally achieved was that plebeians were needed for the army and navy. Why do you think this forced the patricians to give plebeians the rights they demanded?
